

# **Conflict and Violence against Women and Girls: Gender-based Violence and the Boko Haram in Nigeria**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 in which sexual violence was framed as a legitimate international peace and security issue. It brings to light the gender-dimension associated with problems faced by women and girls in time of armed conflict, especially with regards to the use of rape as a weapon of war. As the nature of war and armed conflict over the last two decades has shifted from predominantly inter-state to intra-state, this paper aims to provide another perspective to understanding violence against women in armed conflict at a domestic rather than international level. This paper focuses on the case of Boko Haram's violence against women and girls in Nigeria, which was especially underscored by its kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 that drew widespread outrage both locally and internationally. It explores how economic deprivation, institutional failures and culturally-institutionalised norms of Nigerian society goes hand-in-hand with Boko Haram's anti-Western and anti-Christian ideology, alongside its changing operation tactics, in perpetuating violence against women and girls.*

**Keywords:** *Sexual Violence, Armed Conflict, Boko Haram, Nigeria, Chibok Schoolgirls' Kidnapping*

*Pada Bulan Oktober 2000, Dewan Keamanan Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa (PBB) telah mengeluarkan Resolusi nomor 1325 yang berisi mengenai isu kejahatan seksual dan perdamaian internasional serta keamanan internasional. Resolusi ini telah membawa angin segar bagi wanita dan remaja wanita di daerah konflik. Artikel ini focus pada kasus Boko Haram yang menggunakan kekerasan di Nigeria terhadap murid perempuan di Chibok pada tahun 2014. Artikel ini juga mengeksplor deprivasi ekonomi dan kegagalan institusional dan norma budaya di masyarakat Nigeria*

**Kata-Kata Kunci:** *Sexual Violence, Armed Conflict, Boko Haram, Nigeria, Chibok Schoolgirls' Kidnapping*

## **Conceptualising sexual violence in conflict**

The relationship between military conflict and sexual violence stretches back to history, and is a phenomenon that has repeatedly manifested itself whether in past military conflict or ongoing armed conflict around the world today. In World War I, Belgian women experience mass rape and brutalization by invading German soldiers and in World War II, an estimated 100,000 to 1 million German women were raped in a span of a few weeks by Soviet forces entering Berlin in 1945 (Brownmiller 1975; Grossmann 1995). Similarly, the atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese Army in 1937 in what has become known as the Rape of Nanking included the large scale rape of young

women and girls when the Japanese military invaded the city. In addition, the establishment a system of 'comfort stations' in territories that the Japanese military occupied was euphemism for the abduction, coercion, trafficking of young women and girls, otherwise known as 'comfort women', for sexual slavery (Argibay,2003).

Although sexual violence in military or armed conflict may also be directed at men, this paper will focus primarily on sexual violence against women and girls because it is females who are most commonly targeted during the course of military conflict. Various theories that were built upon radical feminism have put forward different approaches to explain this phenomenon, including essentialism, structural theory, social constructivism and cultural theories. A mixture of these three theories also contributes to what is known as strategic rape theory, where rape is used as a weapon of war. Essentialism views sexual violence in military conflict as a "natural expression of the patriarchal hierarchy that has historically existed between men and women" and therefore rape is a manifestation of what men do to women when they the former are in a position of authority augmented by victory in a military or armed conflict (Zaleski,2015). On the other hand, structural theory takes into consideration "ethnic, religious, political and racial contexts" and highlights that not all women face the same risks during a military conflict. Instead, it is when women are seen as "female embodiments of other socio-cultural identities" that they become targets of sexual violence. Cultural theory relates especially to the military as an institution, where the defilement of women stems from a desire for males who dominate the institution and are involved in the conflict to assert power, against a backdrop of militarism conceptualised on the basis of masculine aggressiveness, authority and antipathy towards women (Zaleski,2015).

These theories should not be seen in exclusivity, as they interact with each other to provide an overarching conceptual framework to understand why sexual violence is perpetuated in military conflict, and how this contribute to the strategic rape theory that will be discussed in the next section.

### **Sexual violence as a weapon of war and Security Council Resolution 1325**

To understand how sexual violence can become a weapon of war, it is first necessary to define 'sexual violence', especially those targeted against women and girls. The International Committee of the Red Cross defines sexual violence as not only rape, but also includes "forced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, forced maternity, forced termination of pregnancy, enforced sterilization, indecent assault, trafficking, inappropriate medical examinations and strip searches" as forms of sexual violence against women and girls. It is when sexual violence is "used systematically to torture, injure, extract information, degrade, threaten, intimidate or punish in relation to an armed conflict" that it amounts to a weapon of war (Curtet, *et.al.*, 2004). The criminalization of sexual violence, as defined above, has been achieved through the existing international legal framework. This includes the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 particularly the Fourth Convention that expressly prohibits rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault (Curtet, *et.al.*, 2004).

The genocidal rape committed in Rwanda and during the Bosnian War in the 1990s, and the atrocities committed against women and girls that epitomised the strategic rape theory were most likely the catalyst and source of pressure for the United Nations Security Council to recognise sexual violence as a threat to peace and international security. The passing of Resolution 1325 in October 2000 and the securitization of the issue of sexual violence against women and girls provides a foundation for bringing in a

more gender-sensitive approach in understanding the impacts of armed conflict on affected populations. Strategic rape, especially in a genocide and other military conflicts divided on religion and ethnic lines, is carried out on the basis that raped women are a “metaphor for a defeated community” because of the symbolic representation of women as embodiments of the family, community and culture that they belong to (Zaleski, 2015). More specifically, “the defilement of women is viewed as a means of demoralizing, or transmitting a message of intimidation, to their menfolk” while terrorising the rest of the population to decrease their degree of resistance against their enemies (Curtet, *et.al.*, 2004). Undoubtedly the experiences of women and girls in armed conflict differs significantly from that of men because of the roles that females play in a family, the wider community, and the biological differences that render women physically weaker and more vulnerable to sexual violence than men.

### **Changing nature of conflict and sexual violence**

Over the last two decades, armed conflict has increasingly shifted downwards from inter-state to intra-state wars. These intra-state wars have largely been characterised by armed conflict between different ethnic groups, or on the basis of different religions. However, sexual violence inflicted upon women and girls continue to be perpetuated for the very same reasons discussed in the earlier sections. As the fighting grounds of intra-state armed conflict are increasingly brought to villages, towns and cities as part of the strategic tactics of parties contributing to the conflict, women and girls inevitably become more exposed to the risks of sexual violence. As men from the opposing side fighting in the conflict gain control and access to the areas where homes and shelters of these women and girls are situated, the absence of the males that they depend upon, who are also involved in the conflict and away from their homes, further accentuates the vulnerability of women and girls left behind to fend for themselves. As a result, this changing nature of conflict not only results in rape as a form of sexual violence, but also includes sex trafficking and more significantly, survival sex (Oosterhoff, *et.al.*, 2014). In a bid to protect themselves and to seek their own safety, this can also result in sexual violence as women and girls who fear, or have been subjected to sexual violence previously, to obtain protection through relations with men who are deemed to be able to protect them and their dependents from repeated violations by other men (Curtet, *et.al.*, 2004).

While the discussion thus far has focused on perpetrators of rape from groups that have initiated the conflict, it is also important to highlight the problem of security forces, who are supposed to provide security, but instead abuse their authority and become perpetrators of sexual violence against those whom they were supposed to protect. For those who are internally displaced and have sought refuge displacement camps, sexual violence can also occur as a result of military leadership in managing these camps where the distribution of relief is traded for sex. This highlights the existing exploitative culture that pervades as a result of corruption and patriarchy that characterizes the organisation of security forces, further revealing the abject failure of the state, law enforcement forces and the judicial system to tackle the abuse of women and girls by the police and security forces (Amnesty International, 2006).

## **BOKO HARAM IN NIGERIA**

### **Conflict driven by ideological differences and economic deprivation**

Although Boko Haram as an organisation existed since the late 1990s, its re-emergence in 2010 has garnered significant attention for being responsible for the large and increasing spate of violence in north-eastern Nigeria, particularly in the Borno and

Yobe states (Mohammed,2014). The group's name, 'Boko Haram' supposedly means 'western education is sinful' and ties in with its fervent commitment to Islamization while drawing connections with other *jihadist* groups such as Al-Qaeda and the ISIS (Osumah, 2013). This underpins the violence and atrocities initiated by Boko Haram that targets anything considered 'Western', such as Christianity as a religion, the secular education system that originated from Nigeria's experience with Western colonialism, and democracy as a system of governance – all of which have been considered anti-Islamic (Mohammed,2014). It is one thing for the group to have such an ideology, but another thing altogether to have people subscribing to such ideology and the motivation that drives them to commit terrorist violence in north-east Nigeria where armed conflict is merged with terrorism (Ramsbotham, *et.al.*, 2011).

### **The appeal of Boko Haram's ideology to the economically deprived**

The violence brought about by Boko Haram has undoubtedly exacerbated social and economic instability. John Campbell, former US ambassador to Nigeria once described Nigeria as "tottering at the brink of failure as a result of poverty amidst plenty", with the country mired in endemic corruption, a weak government, bloody sectarian violence between radical Muslims and Christians, as well as industrial development and agriculture being ignored as a result of wealth from oil (Wosu and Agwanwo, 2014). The experience of Nigeria and the rise of Boko Haram are in line with Edward Azar's 'Theory of Protracted Social Conflict', in which the conflict exemplifies "prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for basic needs such as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation"(Azar,1991). These conditions have subsequently made the Boko Haram ideology an appealing one particularly for those who are economically deprived and view Boko Haram's goals of Islamization as an answer to reversing their miserable fortunes. The root causes of those who have been tempted into involvement with Boko Haram in northern Nigeria are said to be poverty and unemployment driven by bad governance and corruption (Osumah,2013).Notably, the level of unemployment, poverty and economic destitution in Yobe State, the operational base of Boko Haram, is higher than in other geopolitical zones and characterised by the highest percentage of unemployed people of all the states in the country (Osumah,2013). The widespread unemployment and poverty therefore contributes to the growth of Boko Haram, but ironically it also exacerbates the poor economic conditions due to widespread violence that undermines economic development of the region in what Paul Collier terms as 'development in reverse' due to the conflict and poverty trap faced by population of the affected area (Ramsbotham, *et.al.*, 2011).

### **Targeting Christianity and Western Education**

While on one hand the ideology of Boko Haram resonated with disenfranchised Nigerian men who were unemployed and poor, the group's anti-Western ideology further instigates violence against Christians and anything associated with Western modernity especially in education (Onuoha,2010 ; Maiangwa, *et.al.*,2015) . In particular, secular schools, universities and churches have become targets alongside mosques, media houses, communication centres, cinemas, police stations, government buildings, and even the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Abuja (Maiangwa and Agbiboa, 2014). To understand the motivations behind such acts of violence, it is first necessary to understand the typology of the armed conflict instigated by Boko Haram as a revolution/ideology conflict which aims to change the nature of government, as well as the religious orientation of the state from secular to Islamic (Ramsbotham, *et.al.*, 2011). Boko Haram's burning of churches and schools while targeting its teachers and students alike is seen as a weapon against symbols of Western colonialism and Western education which the group abhors (Mohammed,2014). The epitome of

Boko Haram's violence in such a manner was the high-profile kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls from a school in the town of Chibok. Although the attack on a school exemplified the group's aims of undermining the provision of Western education, especially to that of girls, what was equally significant was the changing tactics of Boko Haram in its shift in the target group of their attacks to women and girls and the perpetuation of sexual violence.

### **Evolving tactics used by Boko Haram**

#### *Nigeria's culturally-institutionalised gender-based violence against women and girls*

The basis of Boko Haram's motivations of targeting women and girls and subjecting them to sexual violence largely has to do with the interaction of two factors. These two factors were identified by Diamond as the "rigid interpretations of Islam" alongside the powerful cultural traditions that result in an extreme pattern of gender stratification (Diamond, 2007). The accepted social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequalities in Nigeria to begin with include female genital mutilation, the practice of *purdah* that prevails within the Muslim community whereby women are secluded from public observation, and the discrimination of widows (Ani, 2012). Such gender inequalities, especially towards women, are arguably exacerbated by the lack of both positive peace and negative peace. The lack of positive peace stems from the ingrained cultural norms that have undermined the empowerment of girls and women to begin with, causing them to suffer from economic manipulation and marginalization, sexual exploitation and political marginalization. At the same time, the lack of negative peace characterised by years of civil war and increasing violence by Boko Haram have caused the exploitation and marginalization of women to become even more pronounced.

#### *Boko Haram's ideology on the inferior status of women*

The interaction of factors contributing to the lack of positive and negative peace feeds into Boko Haram's ideology with regards to the inferior status of women, and underpins the discriminatory and violent practices particularly against women and girls. Due to the perceived inferior status of women, Boko Haram therefore considers the education of girls in any system, much less a Western one, 'unnecessary and wrong' as they are destined for domestic duties (Ani, 2012). Moreover, from the perspective of religion and the type of Islamism that Boko Haram subscribes to, the group "espouses an ultra-Salafi ideology that regards women as inferior to men and considers Christian women, in particular, as 'members of an infidel outcast' (Barkindo, *et.al.*, 2013). In combination, these two factors have resulted in the targeting of girls attending schools, as well as Christian women by the violence carried out by Boko Haram. Rape and sexual violence has been the primary form of violence inflicted upon Boko Haram's victims, where perpetrators have cited the Christian women's religion as a reason for the abuse (Human Right Watch, 2014).

#### *Boko Haram's tactics for gender-based violence*

Boko Haram's track record of sexual violence against women and girls include rape, forced marriages and forced conversion from Christianity to Islam. Notably, the kidnapping of women and young girls has been adopted as a new strategy as a precursor to the sexual violence to be inflicted upon its kidnapped victims. More specifically, Boko Haram's deliberate targeting of Christian women and girls who have been attending school can be seen as a manifestation of the view that women are seen as symbolic representatives of their religion's identity and caste. An attack against women is therefore seen as an assault to the community she belongs to (Curtet, *et.al.*, 2004). At the same time, Boko Haram's tactics for gender-based violence can be seen as acts of revenge against the Nigerian government's clampdown and the Nigerian police's

arrest of the wives and children of Boko Haram's group members (Maiangwa and Agbiboa, 2014). Such a response is a manifestation of how gender-based violence initiated by the state can perpetuate further violence by terror groups against the state and the wider population, especially since government forces themselves have been accused of rape, murder, looting and theft. While the perpetrators of sexual violence against kidnapped women and girls by Boko Haram are largely assumed to be men, this neglects consideration for the role of women in carrying out sexual violence against other women and participating in the attacks carried out by Boko Haram.

Although existing literature by scholars such as Elise Boulding have identified women as having an important role in conflict resolution through their capacities as radical change agents and empowered peacemakers, there is also the problem of participation of women and girls in the conflict itself. In the case of Boko Haram, women and girls have, voluntarily or involuntarily, become involved in the tactical strategies of the attacks conducted by the group (BBC,2015). Examples of such involvement include the use of abducted girls to lure government soldiers into positions where they could be targeted by Boko Haram militants, or become suicide bombers as women and girls are presumed to be able to evade detection (Human Right Watch,2014).

Moreover, the wives of Boko Haram leaders themselves were seen to be implicit in the sexual abuses against kidnapped girls and women, as well as participating in the attacks themselves (Human Right Watch,2014). The gender dimension of considering the violence perpetuated by Boko Haram therefore should not be restricted to considering women as victims, but also perpetrators of the violence especially in Northern Nigeria. Nevertheless, a majority of women and young girls continue to be victimized as targets of violence by Boko Haram, and this was most prominently featured in the case of the kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls by Boko Haram in what has become an epitome of the group's track record of inflicting gender-based violence.

## **CASE STUDY – KIDNAPPING OF THE CHIBOK SCHOOLGIRLS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

### **Boko Haram and the Abduction of Chibok Schoolgirls**

On April 14, Boko Haram reportedly kidnapped 276 girls from the Chibok Government Girls' Secondary School in the Borno state, who were slated to sit for their senior secondary certificate examinations. According to a report by Human Rights Watch that documented interviews with girls who manage to escape, Boko Haram gunmen had stormed into the school, seized the female students who had been living in dormitories during the exam period, before looting and burning the school grounds. Subsequently, the gunmen tried to put as many students as they could fit into a truck while the rest were forced to walk at gunpoint to one of Boko Haram's camp before other vehicles came to facilitate their transfer. While some of them had managed to escape along the way, 219 girls still remain missing and are suspected to have been smuggled over the Nigerian border into Chad and the Cameroon (Peters,2014). Two weeks after the abductions, the leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, had claimed in a video that he would sell the abducted girls in the marketplace as slaves (BBC,2014). Although it was not the first time that Boko Haram had attacked a school, it was the media attention that followed which sparked an international outcry as the abduction gained worldwide publicity through the #BringBackOurGirls campaign launched on Twitter (Maiangwa and Agbiboa, 2014).

## **Role of the media in highlighting the problem of Boko Haram**

### *Calls for action to rescue the abducted schoolgirls*

Although it was not the first time that Boko Haram has launched an attack against schools in north-eastern Nigeria, the Chibok abductions sparked widespread outrage amongst local Nigerians. This was not only due to the sheer number of girls who were kidnapped, but also the lack of a swift response by the government to deal with the abductions and discrepancies in the information provided regarding the situation. While the headmistress of the school in Chibok appealed to the government to do more to save the girls, parents of the missing girls staged protests calling on the government to do more in the search for their daughters as protests by Nigerians were staged in towns and cities across the country (BBC,2014). The Nigerian government's reluctance to take any action in response to the abductions also caused an international outcry, with the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education Gordon Brown condemning the actions of Boko Haram and President Obama deploying U.S. personnel, with the agreement of Nigerian leaders, to help find the abducted girls (Peters,2014). The provision of regional assistance and international support from the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Israel and China was also welcomed as pressure mounted for Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan to account for the missing girls.

### *The media and implications for conflict resolution*

The role of social media in calling for more significant action to be taken in searching for the abducted girls and a greater crackdown on Boko Haram can be understood from the contributions that the media and communications revolution has made towards conflict resolution. In particular, global media has become an important area for influencing publics and results in a 'virtual war' where decisive events are those that sway the domestic audience rather than those that affect events on the actual battlefield in a conflict (Ignatiff,2000). It was the #BringBackOurGirls campaign which went viral on Twitter and other social media platforms that catalysed the regional and international response towards the Chibok abductions. Undoubtedly, what has become known as 'hashtag activism', as demonstrated by #BringBackOurGirls, is "powerful in its ability to synthesize and disseminate information, collect transnational response, and politicize feminist issues in public digital space" (Loken,2014). However, mass communications can also readily reinforce the selective perceptions that has already existed within the minds of people, as Loken further argues that the enthusiastic Western response towards the hashtag only entrenches the problematic narratives of women in the Third World as being ignorant, poor and uneducated, and only become of concern to the West when victimized in a large-scale incident. In other words, social media activism shapes the way in which conflicts and incidents are reported, so as to draw connections with the audience in order to draw involvement and invoke personal feelings towards the issue at hand so that they will feel a need to seek a solution.

## **Limitations of 'traditional security' approach to eliminating Boko Haram**

### *Limitations of a military solution*

The reluctance for action on the part of the Nigerian government and the lack of transparency in the information provided about the situation highlighted the incapacity of the Nigerian government to deal with the issue. This was especially since its security forces had experiences of being overrun by Boko Haram militants in past crackdowns against the group. Even with the assistance of military personnel from other countries, the failure to locate the abducted girls more than a year since they went missing further reflects the need to address the root of the problem to begin with. From a wider

perspective, it is the existing gender inequalities and economic marginalization that had rendered women and girls vulnerable as targets of terrorism and in time of conflict, and the lack of access to economic opportunities for youths (especially young men) that provided a hotbed for the recruitment of Boko Haram militants as they turn to ideologies promoted by religious extremism as an alternative to their desperate circumstances.

#### *Government forces perpetuating violence*

In the case of Nigeria, the problem of government forces in perpetuating violence during past experiences of cracking down upon Boko Haram militants was a key contributing factor to the re-emergence of a more violent Boko Haram in 2010. A Joint Task Force, which includes Nigeria's military and law enforcement elements, was established to engage in an insurgency/counter-insurgency battle against Boko Haram. However, its heavy-handed tactics and excesses of authority in dealing with Boko Haram has not only resulted in human rights abuses against the Nigerian population and captured Boko Haram militants, it has also sparked more indiscriminate violence on the part of Boko Haram in retaliating against these tactics (Serrano and Pieri, 2014). This was especially after the extrajudicial killing of their previous leader Mohammed Yusuf, which led to Abubakar Shekau, the former second-in-command of Boko Haram, to emerge as the group's leader and declared that 'jihad has begun' (Zenn, 2013; Pham, 2012). As security personnel who were responsible for the extrajudicial killing were not prosecuted, it is believed that this sparked the ultra-radical turn of Boko Haram since then (Agbiboa and Maiangwa, 2014). While the prominence and necessity of the security sector increases as armed conflict escalates, it is when they lack the ability to control elements initiating the conflict or overstep the limits of their authority that the armed militia group emerges even stronger, and becomes more difficult to manage and eradicate.

## CONCLUSION

### **Boko Haram and Global Terrorism**

The threats to global security since the September 11 attacks in 2001 has increasingly been characterised by religious extremism and *jihadism*. As groups such as Al-Qaeda and the ISIS have not only drawn increased numbers of followers around the world who subscribe to their extremist ideology, affiliate groups such as Boko Haram have also emerged to undermine aspects of human security at the societal level. The kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram exemplifies "one of the central features of jihadist groups: the oppression of women and their continued relegation to an inferior status vis-à-vis their male counterparts" (Agbiboa and Maiangwa, 2014). Boko Haram's tactics for gender-based violence in particular therefore coincides with the gender-based violence perpetuated by other jihadist groups such as the ISIS persecution of Kurdish women in Iraq and Syria for the very same reasons of different religious beliefs and the perceived inferior status of women rooted in their rigid and extremist interpretations of Islamism, and further perpetuated by existing inequalities within the societies that these *jihadist* groups have come to control.

### **Measures for counterterrorism and eradicating Boko Haram**

The approaches to counterterrorism has largely been characterised by the use of military power as seen from the United States' involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria over the last decade, but this has failed to address the more fundamental reasons that drive individuals to join these organisations. Woodhouse argues that a "quick military fix" is rarely possible and military coercion is limited when dealing with what Gray and Waltz identify as fanatical ideologues of international terrorism



(Woodhouse,1999; Gray,2002; Waltz,2002). It is important to identify the motivations of individuals in turning to terrorist organisations, which are largely fuelled by political, economic and social grievances. A critical theory approach towards resolving conflict driven by such motivations, and compounded by religious extremism is put across by Duffield who argues that contemporary internal wars represent “the emergence of entirely new types of social formation adapted for survival on the margins of the global economy”(Duffield,1997). In the case of Northern Nigeria where Boko Haram has embarked on its campaign of violence, it is not only the religious dimensions but also disenfranchisement and inequality that have been identified as root causes of the violence stemming from widespread poverty, unemployment, infrastructural decay and environmental stress (Agbiboa and Maiangwa,2014).

### **Limitations of the “Responsibility to Protect” concept in addressing sexual violence**

On the specific issue of gender-based violence especially against women, international legal frameworks have been put in place but these have had limited reach and enforceability in safeguarding women and girls against sexual violence in armed conflict taking place below the state level (Oosterhoff, *et.al.*,2015). While victims of sexual violence rarely report violations against them due to fear of reprisals, the more fundamental problem stems from the oppression of women by patriarchal traditions and structures that justify both structural and behavioural aggression against women. As much as there is the continuous pressing need to address sexual violence against women and girls in times of armed conflict, the traditional ‘Responsibility to Protect’ concept cannot be invoked as a means of intervention as the fine line dividing genocide and sexual violence cannot be clearly established. Here, it is necessary to highlight the fact that armed conflict does not directly result in sexual violence, but armed conflict exacerbates the existing gender inequalities within the society that conflict has unfolded and makes women even more vulnerable. Increasingly, using a feminist lens to view armed conflict has sought to highlight the different experiences of women in conflict as compared to men, and that different women have different experiences with armed conflict based on their existing economic and societal conditions. The idea of having a ‘responsibility to protect’, therefore, has to be improvised and expanded upon to consider how changes can be made through a bottom-up approach for societal-level concerns of human security increasingly have the potential to become security threats at the global level.

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